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(Unedited Transcript)

It's great to be here. I want to thank the organizers of this for doing this in honor of Geno Baroni. And it's great to see Fred Harris -- do you all remember his slogan when he ran for president in 1976? His slogan was, "The issue is privilege," and it still is. And I think that's reflected in what we heard today, during that --

Remember in 1976, Jimmy Carter got the nomination. Geno Baroni worked for him. And Fred Harris was a candidate. Morris Udall was a candidate. They used to give us pretty good candidates back in those days. And I'll never forget there was Morris Udall, who was one of the funniest people in politics was campaigning outside a factory in New Hampshire, and it was about 20 below zero. And there was a young guy working for Fred Harris who was giving out Fred Harris leaflets.0226

And the young guy kept saying, "The issue is privilege, the issue is privilege."

And finally, Morris Udall turned to the kid, freezing cold, and said, "The issue is pneumonia."

(Laughter.)

It is such an honor to be here with this whole panel, but particularly my dear friends. I think of Brian as my pastor-at-large, and David as my rabbi-at-large. I always have Brian as my candidate for Pope, and I told him I should stop saying that 'cause my candidates usually lose, so maybe I should denounce him and he might have a shot at it someday.

(Laughter.)

And I'm just so grateful to David. I think we all want tickets to that other conference, whatever it is, the unnamed other conference.

Because I knew the rest of the panel -- oh, I just want to say one other thing. I will probably have to leave before, or somewhere early on during the reception afterwards, which I'd like to stay for. I have in size what I like to refer as a 1950s Catholic family discounted for inflation.

(Laughter.)

We have three kids, which I think an economist would tell me is about right, and one of them celebrate 0227her eighth birthday tonight, so I've got to get home in time. I think Geno Baroni would approve of that.

Because I knew that we would hear so many philosophical insights, and because I have never had a chance, personally, to pay tribute to my debt to Geno Baroni, I want to sort of try to answer a slightly different question, which is, what are the circumstances under which the politics of a common good that we are hearing about today, what are, sort of, the political circumstances and social circumstances in which that's possible? And I wanted to speak about that specifically in terms of Geno Baroni's legacy.

I met Geno Baroni only once in my life. I was 19 or 20 years old. And I was a kid from Fall River, Massachusetts, which those of you know it, is a working-class town. If an

organization called the National Urban Ethnic Center was made for any place, it was made for Fall River, Massachusetts. We were about 85 percent Catholic: Irish, Italian, Greek, Polish, French-Canadian.

And when I was in college, I was doing a lot of work on political campaigns, especially in my hometown, although I'm very proud to have (unintelligible) a precinct for Joe Duffy in his great 1970 run for the Senate. I was a one-day -- it was kind of a busman's holiday, and I went down and worked for Joe Duffy.

And I had a lot of friends in college who used to speak incessantly about the working class. A lot of these friends were, not to put too fine a point on it, really wealthy Marxists.

(Laughter.)

And I always said that people who were Leninists we're just trying to trade one ruling class for another. And I used to invite these wealthy Marxist friends down to Fall River. I said, "Come on down, you ought to meet that working class that you talk about so much." And some actually did, and they discovered they actually liked the working class that they talked about so much.

The power of Geno Baroni is that he was trying to bring the attention of the country to a lot of white working-class people, who were being dissed in a very important period of our history. And the important thing about Geno Baroni is he never, ever lost faith in the battle for racial justice. On the contrary, Geno Baroni believed -- and this I think is the first principle we might associate with him -- you don't lift up one group of people thirsting for justice, by putting down another group of people thirsting for justice.

For those of you who are old enough to remember, that was a time when there was a practice among an awful lot of liberals to kind of put down the white working class as if - - we used the term, "working class" in those days. We don't do that much anymore -- to put down the working class as the authors of the injustice that so many African-Americans face. That wasn't what Dr. King believed. It wasn't what an awful lot of people in the civil rights movement believed. But it was a terrible mistake for all the people who were fighting economic injustice and for civil rights.

Monsignor George Higgins, another great person who gives me faith and hope in religious institutions when it starts failing -- Brian, and my rabbi and priest do that for me all the time -- he said of Geno, "He knows that there is little hope of solving the so-called "race problem" in this country unless and until blacks and urban whites learn to pool their resources in a joint effort to solve their common problems.

"But experience," George Higgins went on, "has also convinced him that this will never happen until the ethnics themselves become more conscious of their own identity, and more convinced of their own ability to reform the system, and get off the treadmill on which they are now marking time."0230

So Geno Baroni taught us that there is an obligation for respect across all kinds of lines, the lines of race and the lines of ethnicity. And I think in his affection for tradition, including ethnic traditions, he taught us a second lesson, which is tradition is not the enemy of all change, and change is not the enemy of all tradition.

It seems to me that if one looks at it in that optic, a change that actually makes an enemy of all tradition might be worth thinking about again, and reconsidering. It's worth remembering that the Nazis were also advocates of change, they were a change movement. And that Nazis rejected many of the traditions that we in this room would revere. So change is good in Geno's world, but it has to be tested against tradition. But that no tradition worth anything is going to make itself an enemy of constructive change. And that's why he was an ally of the civil rights movement.

I came to meet him -- at the time, I was working on an undergraduate thesis on Italians in Harlem, because I was interested in some of the same questions Geno was -- he knew a lot more about them than I did, which is why I went to see him -- about why it was that this war had developed between white working class Americans, ethnic Americans, and African-Americans in so many of our neighborhoods.

And there was something about his infectious energy; not simply personal energy, but also an intellectual energy. He was very impatient with this kind of fighting. And you know, I think the third lesson -- if I got my math right, here -- how could you stand up against the injustices done to African-Americans, without standing up against the injustices done to working class whites? We still have that problem. Now it's cast in different terms. We talk more about exurban people, but we still have this same problem, where the allies of justice are often split, now more by cultural questions than by ethnicity and race, although in fact both interplay, both play off together.

And I think Geno's point I think is, well, sort of referenced in terms of that famous metaphor that Lyndon Johnson used. You remember the metaphor that he used in defense of affirmative action, where he talked about the shackled runner? And he talked about the runner who was free in the hundred yard dash, and then a runner who was held back and made it barely 10 yards, 'cause he was under heavy shackles. Didn't make sense, LBJ asked us, to unshackle that runner, start the race over?

Well, LBJ was absolutely right about that. What Geno Baroni taught us is that there were more than two runners in that race. There were other runners who were shackled by burdens of injustice that were not as severe as the burdens of injustice confronting our African-American brothers and sisters, but that if we restarted the race, corrected one injustice without correcting the other injustices, we would still have a flawed race. And as it turned out in our politics, we would create a lot of unnecessary divisions among people who ought to be the advocates of change.

So I think that is another Geno lesson that we still have to think about today.

I think the history of that time -- and I just want to make two other quick points -- it is very important to remember the history of that time. Geno was part of a whole group of intellectuals who were trying to call -- and activists, who were trying to call attention to how a new set of alliances needed to be made, alliances that by the way, Fred Harris was trying to build. In his case it wasn't the urban ethnic center, so much as it was the rural southern wing of this alliance for Justice.

These are people like Geno Baroni who are joined by people like the Reverend Andrew P. Greeley, who wrote one of the best-titled books ever on this question, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?* The question that we ask in a negative way too often in our society.

People like Barbara Mikulski. Barbara Mikulski owes a lot, and she would be the first to say, in her political career, to this guy whose picture is back here.

And also Mike Novak, before he got his infatuation with (unintelligible) economics. It's an unfortunate detour but I have always been fond of Mike.

And again, they were arguing that our vision of the rainbow, that Jesse Jackson talks about, ought to be an expansive and open vision.

You know, Jesse Jackson had a line that I think Geno Baroni would like it very much. Jesse Jackson once I said, "God isn't finished with me yet." I've always liked that because it implies our own capacity in our own lives for reform, renewal, and redemption.

But "God isn't finished with us yet" is an equally applicable statement. God isn't finished with us yet as a society. God isn't finished with us yet, because we have not healed the injustices that were so eloquently described earlier. God isn't finished with us yet, because we do need reform, renewal, and redemption, in our nation.

I think that what we saw in Geno's time was someone who said that racial backlash politics exploits discontents. And that the task of politics is actually to heal discontents. I think we see a version of that now -- and all of our speakers so far have alluded to it -- a version of that now in culture war politics. Culture war politics exploits our discontents and the task of politics is to heal them. That we do talk rightly about divisive issues, and they are serious issues, such as abortion or gay marriage, and they are legitimate, and my friend John Carr could give you a very good speech about that.

And we should talk about them seriously, and I think that liberals need to be more open to pro-lifers that they have been area I think they're getting there, I don't think anybody likes abortion, by the way. I don't see why we can't have a discussion in our society that talks about how to reduce the number of abortions. Because the way to reduce the number of abortions is in fact to ease the injustices that put people in a position where they don't have that choice that we talk about so much.

But when people talk about culture war politics, they don't get to what Geno Baroni used to remind us of all the time. A lot of these discontents are social and economic in root. A lot of people are uneasy with the values that are being conveyed to their children, partly because they feel under all sorts of pressures not to spend enough time with them because there are economic pressures on them not to do so. A lot of people worry about loyalty in our society because they're in an economy that extends less and less loyalty within the structures of the Corporation.

I think Geno reminded us of this. Geno was opposed to all politics that exploited discontent, and he tried very hard to struggle for a politics that healed discontents. That still ought to be our objective today, because as in Geno's time, God isn't finished with us yet. Thank you.